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United States Senate

June 13, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington DC, 20002

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write to express concerns with the Administration's decision to downgrade the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development's (USDA RD) standing by proposing to eliminate the Under Secretary for Rural Development and requesting significant budget cuts to the agency. USDA RD is a vital agency to Montana's rural communities. The agency provides support for critical infrastructure, housing, economic development and public safety in our nation's smallest towns. For USDA RD to maximize its effectiveness and be a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars, the agency needs a strong leader in a prominent role that can be held accountable by Congress and the rural Americans it serves. As such, I respectfully ask you to withdraw the proposal to eliminate the Under Secretary of Rural Development position and to expeditiously recommend a strong nominee with experience working in rural states.

USDA RD's stated mission is to help improve the economy and quality of life in rural America. Its wide portfolio of loan and grant initiatives help expand access to broadband, affordable housing, water and electric infrastructure, and healthcare facilities. The agency also works directly with small business to provide technical assistance and resources to help grow jobs that employ hard-working Americans. USDA RD is one of the only agencies that is solely devoted to the health and economic prosperity of rural areas. For that reason, I am deeply troubled that the Administration is undermining its ability to serve those that call rural America home.

There are a significant number of economic success stories in rural America. I see them every weekend when I travel home to Montana, however, I also see how the demands of the 21st Century economy can put unprecedented strain on rural communities. These demands include universal access to high-speed Internet, modern healthcare facilities and affordable clean water and electricity. That's why USDA RD remains critically important and why its mission should be bolstered instead of limited.

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An Under Secretary of Rural Development is an important advocate and voice for rural America. I firmly believe an individual should be appointed to serve in that role as soon as possible. I stand ready to work with you on empowering businesses to create jobs and build infrastructure in our rural areas. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester